

FIRST THINGS FIRST Coalition Building Standards of Practice¹

Every community experiences gaps in services to young children, often around the areas of prevention and intervention of developmental and health problems. Identifying and addressing those problems can happen in a variety of ways both formally and informally. Sometimes a gap may be identified through a formal community assessment, other times members of the community themselves begin to see a problem developing and want to intervene proactively. Often, multiple service agencies in a given community offer parent education, health education, prevention information and other interventions aimed at addressing the identified community concerns. Many times these agencies may be providing services to the same populations, or working to address the same problems. Though good work is being done, by collaborating together, more might be accomplished. Historically, when addressing community level problems, coalitions have been an effective way to organize and leverage resources. According to the Prevention Institute, “A coalition is a union of people and organizations working to influence outcomes on a specific problem. Coalitions are useful for accomplishing a broad range of goals that reach beyond the capacity of any individual member organization. These goals range from information sharing to coordination of services, from community education to advocacy for major environmental or policy (regulatory) changes.” The benefits of forming and maintaining effective coalitions include; reducing duplication of services, leveraging resources, strengthening bargaining power, and getting “buy in” from community members.

First Things First is interested in supporting community coalition building in an effort to enhance and improve support systems for children birth through age five and their families. Specifically, First Things First would like to support coalitions working toward the improvement of prevention, intervention, and other family supports.

II. Coalition Building Standards

A variety of coalition building models and guides exist. Though they may differ in their specific steps, they do have many common guidelines that may assist those interested in forming and maintaining a coalition to be successful. The development of preventive health and/or child find coalitions involves both coordinated and collaborative efforts. As outlined in the First Things First Coordination and Collaboration Standards of Practice, these two, integral characteristics of effective coalitions are defined as follows:

Coordination: Involves more formal relationships in response to an established mission. Coordination involves some planning and division of roles and opens communication channels

¹ The Coalition/Collaborative Building Standards of Practice includes supplemental standards to address the specific types of coalitions and/or collaborations being established such as Child Find or Preventive Health. The appropriate supplemental standards should be attached along with the general standards.

between organizations. Authority rests with individual organizations, however, risk increases. Resources are made available to participants and rewards are shared.

Collaboration: A more durable and pervasive relationship marks collaboration. Participants bring separate organizations into a new structure with often a formal commitment to a common mission. The collaborative structure determines authority. Risk is greater. Partners pool or jointly secure resources, and share the results and rewards.

Coalition Planning Standards

Effective coordination and collaboration activities take careful planning and a significant investment of time. Before establishing a community coalition, assessment of the collaborating partners' readiness and determination of specific program objectives should occur. Various tools can be used to assess readiness to collaborate. Among the items evaluated in a readiness assessment are:

- existence of a shared vision and coalition objectives;
- inclusion of key organizational and individual stakeholders; and
- leadership capacity.

Having a clear understanding of the factors that impact successful collaboration will help direct initial collaboration efforts. In fact, coalition strategies may also include capacity building that increases the readiness of individuals, organizations, and communities to engage in meaningful collaboration efforts.

Coalition Recruitment

Including the people who both have the skills and the knowledge of the coalition goals as well as the capacity to effectuate change is a key component to successful coalition development. FTF coalition members will be recruited to ensure a broad membership of local level, community individuals as well as those who represent a wide array of service providers and service types. It is important to convene people with diverse perspectives who can then create a vision and clarify coalition expectations, including small neighborhood-based organizations which often help families navigate complex and fragmented service delivery systems. Coalitions should identify both the organizations and the individuals who would be best suited to the work in considering appropriate recruitment.

Establishing Coalition Objectives

Meaningful objectives and activities developed by the coalition are ones that satisfy both the community needs as well as the needs of the participating individuals and agencies. Objectives shall be established by the coalition to set direction and should arise from the shared beliefs of the group. Objectives should include both long-term goals and short-term benchmarks.

Convening a Coalition

Coalition activities shall be conducted in a way that each members' participation is valued and appreciated.

1. Members should all understand the purpose of the coalition
2. Members should understand each of their roles as participants in the coalition
3. Members should understand what resources they bring to the coalition to meet the group's goals and objectives

Structure of the Coalition

Determining how the structure of the coalition is established and maintained is integral to the coalition's success. Coalition members must agree and commit to several structural elements of the coalition. FTF funded coalitions will outline their intended structure as part of the initial planning process. The structural components included in the planning and design of coalitions are:

1. Life expectancy of the coalition: Determining a specific timeframe during which a coalition must conduct its work leads to more successful action and task completion. Coalitions determine their life expectancy based on their group's goals and desired outcomes.
2. Location, frequency and duration of meetings: Meetings occurring at locations seen as "neutral" or not belonging to a particular representation of the coalition adds to the sense of collaboration and openness among members. Coalitions should convene at locations where all members feel a sense of equity. The frequency of meetings is to be determined by the coalition, but may not be less than quarterly. Coalitions that choose to meet more than quarterly, must consider how frequency of meetings may affect members' commitment to the work. Duration of meetings should also be determined by the coalition with the consideration that members will need enough time to accomplish the work in the strategic plan developed.
3. How new members are included: Coalitions should invite and recruit members following the recruitment standards. However, no member should be excluded who shows an interest in the coalition's work and goals.
4. Decision-making processes and procedures: Decisions within the coalition should be made by consensus whenever possible. Recognizing that all members of a coalition may not always agree, coalitions will need to establish how action will be handled when consensus cannot be reached (e.g. by vote, choose not to take action, etc)
5. Meeting Agendas: Establishing meeting agendas in advance provides for structure and direction of meetings. Each meeting will require a clear agenda to be developed and distributed to coalition members in advance of meetings.
6. Participation between meetings: To move long-range goals forward quickly, sub-committees of the coalition may be established. Creating sub-committees will add to the

Ensuring Continuous Progress

To ensure the coalition's success, a process of ongoing self-assessment of the group's work should be used. Conducting a process of reflection throughout the coalition's activities allows the group to adapt and make decisions about elements that may not be working as effectively as desired. This process of monitoring of one's own progress is essential to maintaining the group's productivity and ensuring timely and effective actions.

III. Coalition Coordinator Qualifications Standards

1. Requirements of the Coalition Coordinator must hold a Bachelors degree in a field related to the purpose of the coalition (e.g. if a Child Find Coalition, degree would be in child development, early childhood special education, or other related field; if a Health Prevention Coalition, degree would be in public health, nursing, or other related field) OR have documented work experience conducting the activities of leading a coalition such as member recruitment, strategic planning, facilitation of groups and group dynamics, and evaluation OR a combination of education and experience that meets the necessary knowledge and expertise of the position.
2. Coalition Coordinators should have expertise and knowledge in the following:
 - a. Community building and development;
 - b. Knowledge of human services systems;
 - c. Principles of advocacy and social marketing;
 - d. Experience in facilitation of coordination and collaboration; and
 - e. Knowledge of and experience with tools and resources to assess systems coordination.
3. To address cultural competency objectives, early childhood practitioners /early childhood service providers shall ensure that children and families receive from all staff members effective, understandable, and respectful care that is provided in a culturally competent manner- a manner compatible with their cultural beliefs and practices and preferred language. Early childhood practitioners /early childhood service providers should ensure that staff at all levels and across all disciplines receive ongoing education and training in culturally and linguistically appropriate service delivery. Early childhood practitioners/early childhood service providers should develop participatory, collaborative partnerships with communities and utilize a variety of formal and informal mechanisms to facilitate community and family-centered involvement to ensure that services are delivered in a manner that is consistent with the National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services and/or the National Recommendations on Cultural and Linguistic Competence for the National Association for the Education of Young Children."

IV Supervision, Quality Assurance and Evaluation Standards

1. Effective programs recognize that building and maintaining quality requires an ongoing and iterative process. Participants and their respective partners shall conduct ongoing, reflective practices that continuously assess the quality and effectiveness of the implementation of the coalition.
2. Supervision of program personnel coordinating the efforts of the coalition is conducted as a relationship-based process with mechanisms that support them in challenging situations and provides ongoing and regularly scheduled (no less than monthly) opportunities for discussion to reflect and debrief. Supervision will also include observation, feedback, and opportunities for peer consultation.
3. Compensation and benefits for the personnel coordinating the efforts of the coalition are adequate to support the hiring and retention of highly skilled staff.

V. Coalition Building Implementation Activities

Stakeholders in any coalition building effort will:

1. Establish the overall objectives of the coalition
2. Develop a leadership structure
3. Develop a membership structure
4. Establish a membership recruiting plan
5. Determine the specific activities the coalition will participate in
6. Assess the collective resources of the group
7. Establish a plan to communicate with members, stakeholders and the community
8. Develop a plan of accountability for members
9. Develop a brand
10. Plan to address conflict between members
11. Monitor progress through evaluation and make any necessary changes

Supplemental Implementation Activity Standards for Child Find Coalitions

1. Identify partners necessary to create a comprehensive coalition to include community early childhood programs, AzEIP providers, Head Start programs, any tribal programs within the community, health care providers, and other community based organizations that serve young children and/or families.
2. Identify current activities in the community (asset mapping) that address public awareness and marketing campaigns for locating children who may be in need of additional services.
3. Identify current screening opportunities and procedures among the districts and AzEIP providers within the region.
4. Identify any other sources of screening or public awareness and education activities occurring in the community
5. Identify remaining gaps in the public relations/marketing and screening activities occurring in the region.
6. Identify the needs around informing and educating families in the typical development of children, the availability of developmental and/or sensory screening, and the processes for referral.
7. Based on identified gaps and community needs, develop and implement a plan to address parent awareness and understanding of children's typical development and where to access screening and identification services, enhanced screening services, and/or marketing and public relations related to availability of screening and intervention services.
8. Engage local health care providers of family services such as physicians, hospitals, etc. in building their understanding of the importance of and availability of developmental screening and the process for referral.
9. Engage local early care and education providers in the process of recognizing children's developmental red flags, increasing their knowledge of developmental screening activities, and understanding the process for referral.
10. Develop strategies for transitions between and across district attendance boundaries.
11. Develop and implement recommendations for public relations activities and screening activities that increase the communities' access to services for young children.

Supplemental Implementation Activity Standards for Preventive Health Coalitions